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ABSTRACT

This article explores a number of the problems associated with the use of the concept of "need" in social welfare provisions in general and adult education in particular. A number of general patterns in the use of the need concept are indicated on the basis of a review of the adult education literature. A distinction is made between usages in the areas of policy-making, the practice of adult education, and research. The focus next is on the use of the notion of need in arguments for decentralization of social welfare provision and adult education in the Netherlands. The policy context is central to this exploration of need. The use of the need concept in arriving at assessments of educational needs of a local population is then examined. This discussion is placed firmly in the context of needs research and the difficulties involved in arriving at objective measures of educational need. A critique of needs assessment is related to the broader issues emerging from experience with democratic welfare planning at the local level. Finally, a number of observations are made about approaches to the need concept in social research. (YLB)

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NEEDS RESEARCH AND ADULT EDUCATION POLICY:
a critical appraisal of local educational planning in the Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This article explores a number of the problems associated with the use of the concept of "need" in social welfare provision in general and adult education in particular. Although definitional problems will arise in this article, this is not a search for a more universal definition of need, suitable for all seasons. The central concern is the use made of the concept of need, i.e. its use by different people, in different contexts, and with different purposes. This search for uses of the concept of need is historically located against the background of the development of local planning for adult education in the Netherlands during the 1970's. Empirically we are interested in the actual uses of the need concept in the policy debate which led to the decentralisation of planning responsibilities for adult education to the local authorities, and procedures for assessing needs in the local planning process.

In the first section a number of general patterns in the use of the need concept are indicated on the basis of a review of the adult education literature. A distinction is made between usages in the areas of policy-making, the practice of adult education, and in research. The second section looks at the uses of the notion of need in arguments for decentralisation of social welfare provision and adult education in the Netherlands. The policy context is central to this exploration of need. The third-section examines the use of the need concept in arriving at assessments of educational needs of a local population. This discussion is placed firmly in the context of needs research, and the difficulties involved in arriving at objective measures of educational need. In the fourth section the critique of needs-assessment is related to the broader issues emerging from experience with democratic welfare planning at the local level. In the concluding section a number of observations are made about approaches to the need concept in social research.

1. INTRODUCTION - A VARIETY OF USES OF NEED IN ADULT EDUCATION

The notion of "need" is widely employed in the literature of social welfare and adult education. Titmus (1958) argues that:

> "... All collectively provided services are deliberately designed to meet certain socially recognized 'needs'. "

Bradshaw (1972) states, in his very widely quoted article, that

> "... the history of the social services is the story of the recognition of social needs and the reorganization of society to meet them."

In a similar vein the history of adult education could be regarded as organized responses to the educational needs of adult members of the community, whether individuals or groups. The international literature on adult education supports the salience of need as a concept put to wide use. As in the broader areas of social welfare, the idea of need is used in different ways, by different people, at different times and in different places, with different intentions and different effects. Policy-makers, practitioners, and social researchers seem at least to agree that adult education is in some way engaged in meeting educational need. The notion of need, as used in policy statements, in indicating groups "in need", increasingly pervades current discussions of adult education whether in government documents, the language of practitioners, or in research literature.

In the area of <u>policy-making</u> an increasing use is made of the notion of individual and social need to justify various interventions in the field of adult education. Both in the reports of advisory bodies and in government policy statements the formulation of the educational needs of specific groups of adults is increasingly prevalent. Variations upon the themes of the needs of target groups and changing patterns of need as a result of social, economic, and technological change are variously employed. Similar usages can be found in most european countries together with the consequent emphasis upon special programmes. In the broader areas of educational politics need can become an important rallying-point for resisting expenditure cuts in adult education or for proposals to privatize adult education. As a category in political discourse the notion of need can be employed by

diverse coalitions of interests to legitimate the different formulations of needs perceived.

In the practice of adult education Wiltshire (1973) has pointed out that the concept of need has emerged as a dominant one in the vocabulary of the adult educator. The notion of need is frequently used to argue the case for existing provision or to argue for new forms of provision. The idea of meeting needs as a basic principle of programme-development in adult education leads Lawson (1975) to argue that

> "... a needs-meeting approach seems initially to offer ... the organiser the professional authority which he needs to decide on priorities and to dispose of scarce educational resources more effectively."

The recognition of the unmet needs of diverse groups of adults has been an important factor in much of the vigorous practice of adult education in the 1970's. New strategies and ways of working with these groups have been developed under the general title of "community education". Outreaching work to non-users of adult education provision, for example, has been viewed as a way of getting unmet needs out in the open en encouraging an institutional response to them. Much of the discussion around access and advocacy strategies has turned on the notion of need, and approaches to gaining recognition for needs which existing provision is not meeting. This increasing concern with getting at the needs of the local population seems to justify Lawson's (1975) view that

> "In deciding what shall be included the organiser's first task is said to be that of 'establishing the needs of the area' and this requirement is frequently written into the job description of adult education organisers and administrators."

Establishing the needs of the area has become an increasing preoccupation of practitioners and has led to many innovations in the repertoire of adult education.

The area of research in adult education, especially in its more applied variant, has been increasingly characterized by a concern with needs-research and methods of needs-analysis. Research into educational needs has become an important data-base in decision-making and educational planning. As Cross (1978) argues for the United States

> "... needs assessments were undertaken in the expectation that they could serve as planning documents - that is, they would provide an information base from which decisions could be made."

In this formulation needs-research belongs to the category of so-called "data-based" strategies of social intervention which employ

> "... scientific procedures in order to collect data which will provide policy-makers with a rational, scientific basis for decision-making and problem-solving" (Hornstein et al, 1970).

The adult education literature indicates an increasing concern with techniques to conduct needs-research and needs-assessment. Cross (1970) and Pennington (1980) present statements about the current 'state of the art' for adult education. Smith (1980) provides a critical overview for social welfare provision as a whole. Needs research turns on appropriate methods for assessing not only existing needs for services, but also levels of future needs and the resources required to meet those needs.

Some uses of the notion of need by those involved in some way in adult education have been indicated above. Despite the differences in the use to which it is put, the concept is significant in the practice of adult education, and in the policies which intervene in and help shape that practice. It also plays an important part in research which examines both the practice and the policy of adult education.

Need is widely used and it would seem difficult for any serious discussion of adult education to avoid the concept. However, as Smith (1980) formulates the issue

> "... in spite of its widespread occurance, the notion of need has received scant and unsystematic treatment."

Monette (1977) has pointed to the plethora and imprecision of usages of the concept of need in adult education. Although an important and central notion in adult education discourse it appears decidedly crude upon further examination. Statements making use of the concept can refer to quite different things. The apparent ease of concensus surrounding the notion of need becomes problematic when we look more critically at the actual use of the term in specific areas of social practice. Discussion of need in social policy and in social planning is often launched in the absence of any sense of puzzlement as to the empirical entities to which need refers - the 'social facts' - and the problems of measuring need through needs-research. The commonsense of adult education tends to suggest that educational needs are 'somewhere out there' and that they can be measured by appropriate forms of needs-research. A more sceptical view, however, would

question that need is clearly defined or that those 'in need' can be unequivocably identified. This suggests that we need to look more closely at the notions of need which are actually employed by those involved in adult education. In this article we seek to undertake this task in the context of adult education in the Netherlands during the 1970's. First of all we look at the use of the notion of need in the policy debate which gave rise to the decentralisation of planning for adult education to the local authorities. In the second place we examine the notions of need which have been worked out in the practice of needs-research in local planning procedures.

2. NEED IN GOVERNMENT POLICY: THE DECENTRALISATION OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

The focus here is upon the use of the notion of need in Dutch government policy towards adult education and the reorganisation of provision and planning at the local authority level. An examination of a number of advisory reports, government policy statements, and legislative texts is the basis for indicating a number of uses of the notion of need in public policy debates.

The on-going reorganisation of adult education and planning at the local level is closely associated historically with a broader ranging reform of the organizational infrastructure of the welfare services in the Netherlands. The reorganisation of these services, covering adult and community education, recreational services, and social and community work, can be traced to a number of policy documents prepared in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The most important of these was produced by an advisory committee set up to advise on the harmonisation of welfare policy and legislation. Their report (Problems of Welfare, 1974) gave rise to a long drawn-out public debate on welfare policy and planning, and has resulted in major legislation. The proposals of the 1974 report are significant in that they were intended to achieve a more effective response by welfare services to the needs of the population. The advisory committee viewed the planning process as one which emphasized

> "... the development of vision concerning the future development of society and needs."

To this end a major restructuring of the infrastructure of providing services, institutions and agencies at the level of local authorities was proposed. The advisory committee established the grounds for reorganisation in terms of the failure of the existing organisational structure to meet existing and emerging needs of the local population. It built up its arguments for reorganisation on the assumptions that the existing services did not adequately reach those for whom they were intended, did not react to emerging needs, were poorly co-ordinated and were not democratically organized. An increasing imbalance between the forms of provision and the needs for service was accounted for in terms of organizational variables. The advisory committee focussed on the deficiencies of the organizational structure in effectively meeting needs, and seems to have assumed that the new infrastructure would achieve this task. It's key proposals were based on five generic principles for the reorganisation of the welfare services in general and adult education in particular. These principles were:

- improved co-ordination of the different services;
- reducing access barriers to the services;
- enhancing the democratic control of services;
- greater flexibility to emerging needs;
- increasing the rights of service-users.

The proposed means to these ends were the decentralisation of policy to the local authorities, and the creation of procedures for democratic planning of services at the local level. The resulting legislation instituted complex procedures for local planning including a compulsory needs-assessment procedure and consultation of the population.

In the draft decentralisation legislation it was argued that

> "... a range of provision can be created which as nearly as possible meets the locally existing needs." (Preamble, 1977).

Broader public participation in local planning procedures - of individual citizens, interest groups, voluntary organisations, client groups, and service agencies - was proposed with a view to ensuring that

> "... the local and provincial plans and programmes as nearly as possible correspond to the local and provincial needs."

Participation in democratic planning was regarded as a necessary condition for the appropriate degree of flexibility and responsiveness

to emerging needs which allow

> "... a rapid response to experimental and emerging forms of provision." (Preamble, 1977).

In both the advisory committee's original report and the legislative measures an argument for a more effective meeting of needs is formulated in terms of organizational change based upon democratic planning procedures. However, nowhere do we find any explicit definition of what is to be understood by the term need. It is used widely without being specified, and is used to refer to different things. A close reading of the relevant documents suggests that their authors move easily and apparently unquestioningly between several different meanings of the term. The legislated planning procedures - to which we return in the following section - would appear to be intended to measure a very uncertain variable. What is to be measured in the course of assessing needs is by no means clear. Nevertheless, the basic planning exercise is intended to achieve a better match between the resources available for adult education services and the manifestation of a very uncertain category i.e. the needs of the population. The nature of the problems first appears when we meet the argument that

> "... the wishes of the population, the providing institutions, and the local authority with regard to the desired provision of services can provide an indication of resource allocation." (Regulations, 1978).

In the specific case of adult education we read that

> "... a varied provision of adult education should be created with the objective of meeting educational needs." (Guide, 1976)

Articles in the appropriate regulations state that

> "... the plan must indicate the ways in which the needs of the population can be met by existing forms of provision and new initiatives which may be necessary." (Regulations, 1976).

However, in the same regulations it appears that the same plan must also indicate

> "... which forms of adult education are necessary ... to satisfy the wishes for education... and the realisation of the desired provision" (Regulations, 1976).

Furthermore, the plan should allow for unmet needs by giving

> "... special attention to those groups who are inadequately reached by existing services." (Regulations, 1976).

More effective needs-meeting through reorganisation, i.e. decentralisation to local authorities, is argued, from the original advisory committee report to the legislation and associated regulations, and assessment of needs is granted a central role in democratic planning procedures at the local level. Nowhere is it made clear what we are to understand as need. Various uses of the term are available, referring variably to the 'wishes', 'educational needs', 'desired provision', 'necessary provision' and 'unmet needs'.

This situation does not improve when one turns to the reports of the advisory committee on Local Educational Networks which devoted a great deal of attention to the developing infrastructure of local adult educational planning and methods of assessing educational needs. Need as a key element of planning and determining the patterns of provision at the local level is clear. In the fifth and final report the central place of need is seen as follows:

> "In the first place it concerns a principle of design for adult education and the way that adult education should be developed. It is preferable to start from the needs." (Fifth Report, 1979).

The committee does seek to give some body to the need concept by introducing a distinction between subjective and objective educational needs. Since this distinction has not been without some influence in local planning and needs assessment methods, we examine it more closely. The important definitions are to be found in the committee's second report (Second Report 1977). Subjective needs are defined as:

> "... needs experienced by individuals and groups as deficiencies in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are more or less easily expressed as a manifest demand, but which are sometimes not expressed."

Objective needs are defined as:

> "... needs identified by third parties in the problem situations of individuals and groups in the present or the future."

The simplicity and clarity of this distinction between subjective and objective needs is more apparent than real, and immediately gives rise to major problems.

The category 'subjective needs' entails, on the one hand, an idea of need as experienced by individuals and groups, but, on the other hand, such subjectively experienced needs are not always expressed. Further discussion of this issue in the reports leads to a distinction

between manifest need as experienced and expressed, and latent needs as being unexpressed, but with a suggestion of their being in someway subjectively held. A close reading of the second report of the committee also produces a category of 'dormant needs', which are subjectively held but, nevertheless need to be activated in some way.
The category of 'objective needs' is no less problematic when looked at more closely. Problem situations identified by others are clearly not formulated as subjectively experienced latent or dormant needs, which may yet have to be articulated. It is not made clear whether the problem situations identified by others are to be equated with some sense of 'real need' of which individuals and social groups are not as yet aware. We are not enlightened, furthermore, as to the problem situations which may be indicative of objective educational needs, nor of the criteria which may be employed by third parties to identify these problem situations. A further problem with objective needs concerns the transformation of problem situations identified by third parties into the subjective consciousness of the population concerned, i.e. how they can become the subjectively experienced needs, which can be the only motivation for eventual participation in educational activities.

The ubiquitity of the concept of need is confirmed in the Dutch situation as this cursory glance at advisory reports, legislation, and local plans confirms. However, the distinction between subjective and objective needs soon loses a great deal of its original clarity and increases in ambiguity to the point of presenting major problems for needs-assessment in educational planning. The shifting meanings identified in the policy discussions and consequent legislation have by no means been resolved.
This section has attempted to delineate the uses made of the concept of need in the public discussion about the decentralisations of responsibilities for policy-making and the planning of service provision in Dutch adult education.
A number of conclusions may be permitted. In the first place, a major reorganisation of the infrastructure of service provision has been argued in terms of the failure of the existing structure to meet needs. The capacity of services to succeed in meeting needs, it was argued, would be promoted by a more effective planning of services at the local level and closer to the populations to be served.

This line of argument proceeded, in the second place, on the assumption that needs are known or can be known, and that knowledge about needs should be an important part of the planning procedures at the local level. Thirdly, the assessment of needs as an important factor in determining the planning of services is based upon a view that needs are 'out there' and can be assessed. This view has lead, fourthly, to the legislation of compulsory procedures for needs assessment in the local planning procedures. However, this far-reaching series of proposals for reform, which has since been implemented, has been based upon a very ill-defined understanding of the notion of need. Contributors to the policy debate did not succeed in setting-out what they understood by need, or understood different things when they used it. This has meant, in the fifth place, that the measurement of a very poorly defined notion of need is required of the local authorities. A major lack of definitional clarity can be located, which can lead to the conclusion that the various parties concerned - practitioners, administrators, researchers, client and politicians - in some mysterious way share an understanding of some 'common-sense' definition of need. It is most unlikely, sixthly, that references to the wishes of the population, desired provision, educational needs, needs of the population, the wishes for education, and unmet needs, actually refer to the same things. The commonly accepted distinction between subjective and objective needs has done little, in the seventh place, to offer concepts of need that can serve as a guide to the collection of data about needs. This created the problematic categories of latent and dormant needs, which are neither clearly subjective nor objective in character. The general nature of the policy debate has tended, to assume, eightly, that need is an unambiguous phenomena and is a measurable characteristic of individuals and social groups. The idea of needs being 'out there' contributes, in the ninth place, to an idea of objective need as not only being independent of the subjective wants of potential users of adult education provision, but also as being independent of the notions of need employed by the providing agencies and their personnel. 'Last but not least', the notion of objective need holds little water when we take into account the possible influence of the perceptions of third parties associated with assessments of objective needs.

The confusing use of the notion of need indicated in the policy discussion surrounding the decentralisation of adult education policy-making and local planning procedures does not bode well for the civil servants in charge of implementing the legislation for democratig planning. Whatever the taxonomy of needs employed, there are no easy solutions available to the policy-makers, the local authority employee, or the social researcher who engages on the difficult path of needs-assessment. As Doerbecker and Hake (1982) observe flegmatically of the Dutch context:

> "Educational needs are not somewhere 'out there', not the easy prey of methods of needs analysis, and they are certainly not well defined and easy to identify."

Given the argument that the reorganisation of the provision of adult education in the Dutch context should proceed, at least partly, on the basis of needs-assessment at the local authority level, it would seem appropriate to turn to the methods of needs-assessment which have been developed by local authorities in the Netherlands.

3. NEEDS IN LOCAL PLANNING FOR ADULT EDUCATION: SOME PROBLEMS OF NEEDS-ASSESSMENT AND THE DATA-BASE FOR DECISION-MAKING

The concept of need has been widely employed in the Netherlands to argue for major changes in the legislation governing procedures for policy-making and local democratic planning in the welfare field. Far-going changes have been consequently implemented which are intended to produce a more effective needs-meeting capacity of the social welfare services. Furthermore, the decentralisation of welfare planning to the local authorities has produced detailed regulations for the planning procedures to be followed by the authorities. A varied and ambiguous use of the notion of need has been indicated in both the policy debated and the resultalt legislation. Nevertheless, the planning regulations require the local authorities to undertake assessments of the needs of the local population. It should not be surprising that the problems of assessing such an ill-defined entity as 'need' have become a major preoccupation in local planning practice.

The situation can be briefly sketched as follows. During the build-up to general legislation for the whole of social welfare provision, new regulations for the local planning of adult and community education were gradually introduced. New planning regulations were announced in 1976 and became operational in 1977. These regulations were extended to the broader area of social-cultural activities in 1979, and will eventually be harmonized under the definitive legislation for the entire welfare field. Under the planning regulations the local authorities are required to produce four-year plans and an annual programme of activities. To this end the authorities are required to undertake an assessment of existing service provision, and an assessment of the needs of the population. Such assessments are intended to provide a data-base upon which decisions can be made to achieve a better match between the needs of the population and the structure of service provision. These tasks of assessing provision and need in the area of welfare were new to local authorities, and the growth of welfare departments to implement the planning procedures has been significant. However, little experience or expertise in assessment techniques were available to those appointed to new welfare planning posts. The practical repertoire of assessment activities developed have been reported in a number of research studies which present an indication of the needs-assessment undertaken.

The regulations governing the local welfare planning suggest that for

> "... such assessments a number of methods are available: surveys, interviews, hearings, and analysis of secondary data." (Regulations, 1978)

In a guide compiled by the Netherlands Association of Local Authorities similar approaches to needs assessment in adult education are outlined (Guide, 1976). More specifically this guide for local planners suggests that needs assessment should be directed to the assessment of subjective and objective needs. A similar guide has been prepared for the wider planning area now involved in welfare planning by the authorities.

These guides have become the bibles of local planners as Strik (1982) has reported. The 'how to do it' problem of needs-assessment has consequently concentrated upon procedures for assessing respectively subjective and objective needs. Diverse practices have been developed but a number of assessment procedures have become more or less the

standard repertoire of local planners. Goedhart (1982) suggests four main aspects of needs-assessment

> "... (a) a survey of welfare organisations; (b) a survey of the needs for welfare provisions among the population; (c) a community profile based on demographic, territorial planning, and socio-economic data; (d) interviews with opinion-leaders with important functions in the local authority."

The variation in actual planning practice is well illustrated by those research studies which have examined the workings of decentralized local welfare planning and especially adult education. Van Diemen and Kraan (1981) report for example, that of the 77 local authorites they studied, 53% investigated the needs of the population in some way, and in 40% of these cases the population as such was asked directly what they considered to be their educational needs. Direct participation by the population through "hearings" is provided for in 8% of local authorities, and normally is restricted to participation after the plan for adult education has been prepared. This results in a picture of needs assessment being conducted largely by consulting the welfare organisations as to the needs of users and non-users, interviews with opinion-leaders as to the needs of the population, or the development of community profiles based on secondary data. This suggests, furthermore, that assessments of objective needs tends to take place to a greater degree than the assessment of subjective needs as felt by the population.

The intention of needs assessment procedures in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, is to provide a reliable data-base as the basis of social planning. As the Dutch Association of Local Authorities formulates the position:

> "In the context of planning the issue is to detect imbalances in the relationships between needs and provision. The evaluation of the existing provision in the light of what is needed is vitally important." (Guide, 1976)

As Knox (1979) summarizes the international literature on needs assessment in adult education:

> "Proficient practitioners use somewhat more formal procedures for needs assessment, which entail use of several methods of obtaining information about educational needs. The types of information include: expressed preferences by potential participants, demon-

strated willingness to respond to the programmes when offered, conclusions by experts regarding educational needs of a category of adults, evidence of those affected by the proficiency level of a category of adults, and proficiency as compared with similar adults."

The comfort afforded by international comparison, however, should not distract our attention from the problems associated with any attempt to assess educational needs. Whether we are concerned with assessment of subjective or objective needs, the question is one of what is being assessed and the validity of the notion of need employed. A further examination of the main approaches to needs assessment in the Netherlands should direct our attention to how the concept of need is employed in this kind of applied social research. Two questions can then be asked:

- what notion of need is being employed in needs assessment? and
- what relationship is there between the notion of need and data collection strategies?

Assessing Subjective Needs

A first step in assesing subjective needs among the adult population can involve gathering information about the prevailing levels of demand for existing services. This can provide a measure of expressed demand for services or "felt need as turned into action" as Bradshaw (1972) defines it. However, expressed demand cannot always be satisfied due to the shortage of resources available to providing agencies. This suggests an indirect measure of "unmet" subjective needs, which can be assessed by looking at the waiting lists for educational activities maintained by the agencies. The total of expressed demand can be then regarded as the sum of met and unmet expressed needs, and provides an almost direct indication of the required expansion of resources to allow agencies to meet this unmet demand. Such measures of expressed need and especially the use of waiting-lists as an indication of unmet demand are widely employed in the social welfare field (Smith, 1980). At the same time such assessments of needs are the easiest to obtain and the most inadequate. Waiting-lists of specific institutions may include persons who have already found a place by another agency or have effectively withdrawn their demand in the meantime. Furthermore, any one individual may be registered on the waiting-list of a number of agencies. Agencies also have the

habit of "saving-up" potential clients until they have a large anough group to warrent subsidy from the local authority when minimum c ass numbers are required. Other agencies may be closing down courses which fall below these minimum numbers. On the whole it could be argued that waiting-lists of individual agencies when totted-up provide an inflated assessment of the potential unmet expressed need in the local authority area.

A second step would be to assess the felt needs, wants of preferences of the adult population. These are the subjective needs which are not always expressed as demand as Bradshaw (1972) defines "felt need". In the Netherlands assessments of such needs are carried out with a surprising range of methodological ingenuity. It is not unknown for brief questionnaires to be placed in local newspapers and freely distributed advertising papers. Readers can be requested, for example, to indicate four priorities for educational activities. Questionnaires are also sometimes distributed through the various public agencies which provide adult education or other social welfare services. Given the highly selective nature of response to such approaches to the population, it is sometimes decided to undertake a sample survey under the adult population. The sample may or may not be drawn from both those using and those not using existing agencies. The questionnaire or interview protocols may include questions about needs for existing forms of services, and in some cases will also cover felt needs for services which do not at present exist.

While drawing variously on standard techniques for survey research and especially marketing research, a number of problems arise with regard to this common approach to needs assessments. Bokma and Doerbecker (1977) argue for the Dutch situation that the often heard plea for reliable and valid assessment of subjective needs ignores a number of essential problems concerned with the marketing research approach to assessing subjective needs for educational products. They point out that even given the most positive conditions for a sample survey - which are not normally yet in practice - most adults are very bad predictors of their future educational behaviour i.e. consumption. Many adults appear to express felt wants for specific courses under survey conditions, but do not turn up on enrolment night, while others who express no consumer preference do turn up.

Some express interest in course A but enrol for course B, while potential A and B course students turn up at course C or D etc. Furthermore, they point out that the market for educational products is not to be compared to the market for consumer goods. The potential consumer of education is not easily able to estimate the benefits of participation in a specific course of educational activity, and these are not always clearly formulated by the providing agencies. Educational consumption is not to be regarded as the decision 'to buy' a specific course in preference to others, as is the case with washing-machines. Past, present and further educational participation is more a question of continuous assessment based up on actual experience of educational activity.

To this can be added the argument that the consumer's knowledge of the educational market is in many ways limited by previous experience. As Doerbecker and Hake (1982) point out,

> "Most adults have a limited view of the total provision of adult education, which can seriously limit their estimation of a matching educational activity. Furthermore, expression of felt needs is most likely to be formulated in terms of existing provision rather than wants for some non-existing provision."

Further cititicisms of this approach have been formulated by Smith (1980). He points out that the requests of a population for a particular form of service may be taken as the expression of felt need, but that it equates the economic notion of consumer utility preferences with the notion of felt need. This suggests a distinction between 'use values' and 'needs', which in itself creates the requirement of another measure of need which is independent of consumer preferences. Smith further points to the problem of allowing for the expression of preferences for services which are quite different from those in operation at the present. He too points to the tendency of potential service users to state their wishes in terms of existing provision and forms of service, since few potential clients possess the information for them to do otherwise. In such approaches to the assessment of felt needs there are clearly a number of features present which should be avoided in any research design seeking to employ a valid concept of need. Measures of felt need may variously be referring to felt need for existing services, felt need for improved access to existing services, or felt need for non-existing services. Since these will be coloured by

experience with existing services, the independence of such measures of need in relation to existing provision must be seriously questioned.

A variation upon the theme of assessing subjective needs is to adopt a community survey approach to the needs of specific groups among the population. This approach is well known in the adult education literature on needs research (Hand 1960, Knowles 1970). The recent literature on community development and community work approaches to adult education also witness to this approach (Lovett 1975, Fordham et al. 1979, Newman 1979). This is no less true of the community work approach to neighbourhood and adult education in the Netherlands (Van der Veen 1982). The close association with action research is pointed out in the viewpoint of Lees (1975) that it seeks:

> "... to encourage the involvement of residents in deprived area in identifying needs and problems."

This entails discussing problems with the users and non-users of services to discover widely held perceptions of relevant issues and thus helping local people to define their needs for themselves.

Problems with this approach to assessing the subjective needs of specific groups in the local population arise from the different perceptions of need which may be identified within organized community groups. Working through organized community groups to arrive at an assessment of needs cannot avoid the possible differences in the perceptions of the opinion-leaders in such groups and those they claim to represent. As Lees (1975) reports:

> "... there was no necessary congruence between 'needs' as identified by ... leaders of an immigrant organization and those expressed by the immigrant population."

It is necessary here to take into account the tendency of organisations, even those among the underprivileged, to be dominated by small leadership or elite groups of activists. In addition to expressing the quite legitimate felt needs of their constituencies, community group organisations can be used as a platform for the needs of the organisational leadership rather than the needs of the constituency itself (Piven and Cloward 1977). This certainly presents problems for the local welfare planner seeking to work through established community organisations to arrive at an assessment of felt needs, and for those involved in assisting local people to articulate their needs. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the purposes of community

self-surveys as developed in community work are not purely those of data-collection, even when influenced by the need to display major patterns of social inequality and the unfair distribution of resources to felt needs. As developed originally be Lewin (1946) the mobilizing of community groups through the community survey was as important as the data collected. In more recent usage the community self-survey has clearly been associated with the use of data in the pursuit of advocacy strategies on behalf of community groups (Kahn 1973).

George and Wilding (1976) refer to the assessment of subjective needs as a 'populist approach' in which what the peopole want is defined as need. A number of reservations regarding this approach may be summarized here:

- the assumptions surrounding the notion of need is essentially atheoretical, as a result of which common-sense notions of need prevail;
- the lack of conceptual clarity entails that need is viewed as an attribute of the individual or collectively which can be assessed by means of some measurement operation upon the potential client population;
- the resulting measures of need are largely coloured by social processes which determine the formation of subjective preferences for educational activities, while these are usually not accounted for in analysis of response and non-response;
- furthermore, the felt needs and expressed demands of the population are to an unrecognized degree influenced by knowledge and experience of the existing forms of provision, and are unlikely to elicit needs for non-existing services in the present;
- the implicit analogy with a market for educational products resides in the compression of need into measurements of consumer preference schedules;
- adults appear to be poor predictors of their future educational behaviour, and the data produced by subjective needs assessment provides little firm ground for taking solid decisions about the allocation of resources;
- we are left with the problem of latent or dormant needs which are frequently signaled in the Dutch literature. Are these to be regarded as more appropriately objective needs defined by others than those concerned?

- fundamental questions arise with regard to the idea that educational wants or preferences can be assessed in the same way as wants for consumer goods, and associated arguments more recently for the privatisation of adult education i.e. returning it to the market place as the mechanism of distribution.

Assessing Objective Needs

Awareness of the limitations of assessments of subjective needs has directed attention in local welfare planning to the assessment of objective needs. George and Wilding (1976) point to what they call the "expert approach" as the possibility of arriving at measures of objective needs which are independent of the subjective needs of the population. In the developing repertoire of local planning in the Netherlands we can distinguish a number of options which are employed to this end. We look once again at the notion of need employed and the measurements achieved.

The construction of a community profile and the development of social indicators plays an important role in Dutch exercises in local planning. The community profile is intended to provide an indication of the problem situations in the local authority area, and the social indicators provide measures of housing standards, levels of education, unemployment, number of single-parent families, income levels, numbers of immigrants, etc. Within the authority the social indicators may be separated out for the various neighbourhoods to provide an indication of the relative measure of problem situations. This may suggest the basic information to be used to reallocate resources to those neighbourhoods with the greatest problems. In most cases the data is compiled through making use of already existing statistical materials such as demographic data, socio-economic data, and data on the social infrastructure drawn from local territorial planning.

Extensive comparative studies of users and non-users of educational services have not been conducted to any large degree in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, elements of this approach can be located. On the one hand the local authority may lay down certain desired educational standards for the population.

Social indicators of the educational standards among the population may be employed to provide an assessment of the number of people who do not currently meet the desired standard. An indication of educational need is produced. On the other hand, without defining such a desired level of provision, a comparison may be made between those using services and those not currently using them. Where non-users share the same characteristics as those using services, they are regarded as being in need of the services. A measure of those 'in need' is achieved in either approach.

A significant option in the Dutch context is the consultation of 'expert' opinion to provide measurements of objective needs. The now classic definition between subjective and objective needs, which is widely employed in the Netherlands as we have seen, suggests a number of sources of objective expert opinion (Hinnekint 1972). Statements of objective needs of the population or specific categories within it, may be elicited from social researchers, independent professional experts, agency workers, referral agents, and others who have knowledge of the social situation of the population e.g. church leaders, trade union representatives, doctors, midwives, etc.

Also of interest to some in the Netherlands (Bokma and Doerbecker, 1977; van der Veen 1982), but not widely used in planning, is the experimental approach to determining educational needs. This approach illustrates many of the features of the 'selective appeal' model proposed by McKinley (1973). Experimental programmes are developed on the basis of the presumed needs of a specific target population. Resulting programmes are run experimentally and the capacity to meet the needs of the target population is evaluated. Important for local planning of adult education is the assumption that the needs of known target groups can be objectively assessed and appropriate programmes developed on this basis.

These main options for assessing the objective needs of the adult population share the common assumption that it is possible to arrive at objective measures of needs which are independent of the subjective needs felt by the population. As George and Wilding (1976) argue the result of such assessments may be in agreement with as well as in opposition to the results of the populist view of subjective needs.

The tendency to view this measuring of objective need as in some way an indication of 'real need' (Bradshaw 1972; Monette 1977; Smith 1980) is less imporant than the uncertainty which surrou.ds the claims to objectivity and independence of such measures of need. This point most obviously relates to the objective nature of needs of the population indicated by so-called expert opinion. The normative nature of assessments based on expert opinion will be immediately clear. At the extreme it could be argued that there may be as many different and conflicting normative standards laid down as there are experts (Bradshaw 1972). If anything in the literature of needs and need-assessment is clear, it can only be that normative criteria vary from expert to expert, and between different categories of expert assessors (Smith 1980). By locating various factors deemed to be in some way causally related to educational needs among adults, and then measuring these to provide an assessment of objective needs, we do indeed escape from the subjective needs of the population, but at the same time become enmeshed in the subjectivity of expert opinion. Such expert opinions cannot be divoced from the differing perspective of experts and their understandings of the causal social circumstances which may precipitate educational needs. In the sense that the subjective needs of the population are the products of socialisation and experience with the educational services, expert opinions are subjective states produced by professional socialisation in training or experience of working within the service agencies. Expert opinions are closely related to the various ways of thinking about the causes of 'social problem situations', and the appropriate measures to be taken to resolve the problems identified.

While this criticism of need assessment on the basis of the normative criteria employed by experts may seem easy game, the problems of expert opinion reappear when we consider the other options for assessing objective needs. In the first place, we encounter problems with the use of secondary data to construct a community profile and the development of social indicators of problem situations and educational needs. Even the purely statistical material employed to construct social indicators can be questioned as to its reliability and validity. This empirical data has to be interpreted in terms of some understanding of the social circumstances which give rise to educational needs.

Different understandings of the social circumstances which are casually related with educational need are also significant in determining the data to be collected. Opinion as to these causal relationships between social circumstances and the pathology of educational needs will vary in terms of the expert perspectives engaged. A clear example would be differences of opinion as to explanation of social and educational disadvantage in terms of socially transmitted inadequacies or in terms of structural factors (Holman 1973). This would suggest that the compilation and interpretation of social indicators may be indeed independent of the subjective needs of (non)users of services, but they are very dependent upon the normative criteria held by the experts involved.

Similar problems are encountered in the provision of experimental programmes and the determination of a specific level of basic provision for known target groups, which are based on the presumed objective needs of the groups to be provided for. The development of experimental programmes or basic provision is usually argued in terms of some understanding of the educational disadvantage of specific categories among the adult population and some idea of the educational competencies required by them (Keddie 1980). Once again we are faced with the possibility of different understandings of need-producing social circumstances, and of the appropriate competencies. In practice it could be argued that what is being measured are not objective needs but that which the expert terms need. When the potential users make use of experimental programmes or basic provision the idea that they are 'in need' is confirmed. Non-participation is likely to lead to measures to get the programme to them and a concern with reaching the "difficult to reach"; service delivery becomes an issue to which we return.

The problems of dependence on expert opinion are by no means resolved when we turn to those assessments which compare users with non-users of services to achieve measures of objective need. Such studies rely on an objective criterion for comparison. Comparative criteria seem to offer the chance to avoid the 'value-trap' of normative criteria. Those using existing services are 'in need', and those sharing the same characteristics but not using services are regarded as a consequence, as also being 'in need' of the service. However, a

singular circularity of argument can be identified in such comparative studies as Smith (1980) clearly points out. A criterion of educational need is required which is independent of the agencies providing educational services. The measure of need usually employed is that of some measurement of social circumstances giving rise to educational need. However, it must first be decided which social circumstances are need-producing. To achieve this some indicator of need is required. This indicator is taken to be those using the educational services at the present time. These users have been admitted to the service because they are 'in need' i.e. they manifest the characteristics associated with the social conditions producing need. Those with the same characteristics but not using the service are also 'in need' of the service. Apparently, a set of objective social circumstances producing educational need have been established, which allows an assessment of the needs that have yet to be met i.e. a measure of 'unmet need' has been produced. However, as has already been pointed out, it all depends on the undetandings of social circumstances which are needs-producing. Taking those presently using the services in order to determine the unmet needs of non-users, brings us full circle to the understandings of need-producing social circumstances which are held by agencies when setting up the original form of provision. It is, therefore, these understandings of agencies and agency-workers which are paramount in determining comparative educational needs. In this way, measures of comparative needs cannot be regarded as being independent of expert opinion in the broad sense, nor as being a measure of objective need. Furthermore, the notion of comparative need is tied into a notion of need rooted in existing services, since the needs of users of these services are the essential measure of need.

The assessment of objective need is intended to provide information on the needs of the population which is independent both of the subjective wants of the population and the notions of need held by the providing educational services. Our criticism of the repertoire of assessment procedures available to the local planner suggests that measures of objective needs are to a great degree dependent on the notions of need held by those in the needs-meeting business. Independent measures of objective needs can be criticized on the follow-

ing points:

- need continues to be seen as an attribute of the client constituency which can be measured;
- need is indicated by the problem situations in which the client, the individual or group, is placed;
- problem situations are regarded in terms of needs-producing social circumstances;
- both normative and comparative criteria of need are dependent upon different understandings of needs-producing social circumstances;
- this leads to a dependence on the realm of value-bias in expert knowledge which is not explicated;
- as a consequence the categories of need held by agencies and practitioners dominate assessments of objective needs;
- the assessments of need achieved are not independent of existing services, and tend to be formulated in terms of existing services, numbers in receipt of services, and those requiring them i.e. regarded as being in need;
- the assumption is that existing services are meeting needs, although these are dependent on the concepts and notions of those engaged in meeting needs.

In local welfare planning it is possible to accomplish measures of objective needs but the validity of these assessments as being independent of agency related notions of need must be questioned. Objective needs are in reality measurements of the varying perceptions of diverse bodies of expert opinion which are employed. They are only objective in the sense that they are not located in the subjective experience of those found to be 'in need'. Being found to be objectively 'in need' means more or less that certain experts are persuaded that certain social conditions are needs-producing.

4. THE USE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

The local authority planner in the Netherlands can more or less successfully accomplish the task of assessing the needs of the local population. He may produce a number of measures of the subjective needs and will complement these with a possible number of assess-

ments of objective needs. A broad range of data about needs will be produced in the planning process. In all local authorities this data will be brought into the deliberations of the advisory committee which is set up to prepare a draft plan for presentation to the full council of the authority. This committee is supposed to represent the various interests in the authority area. It is responsible for working up the data available to it into a draft plan which includes proposals for the allocation of the available resources to the agencies which can most appropriately meet the needs of the population. This also involves setting priorities among the wide-range of needs and suggesting measures for positive discrimination in favour of certain categories.

The use of data about the needs of the population can be used in different ways in the planning process. These uses depend on the assumption of those involved as to the phenomena which has been assessed and the nature of the data produced. There may be a tendency to regard the results of the needs assessment as an objective statement of a factual state of affairs with an empirical basis. Empirical statements of need as a data-base for decision-making can provide an objective measure of needs which can extricate the decision-making by allowing reference to 'the facts' of the situation. Monette (1977) argues that:

> "... the concept of need is an attractive one in adult education because it appears, by its straightfoward appeal to empirically determined facts, to obviate the educator's responsibility for making value-judgements, thereby escaping arguments about values."

While not being in agreement with Monette's reference to the educator's responsibility for making value-judgements - more parties are involved in democratic welfare planning - it is important to note the use of objective assessments of empirical needs to justify decisions in the planning process. Whether in times of expansion or expansion or the present catharsis surrounding 'the cuts' in public expenditure, decisions often appeal to the empirical statements of needs, and can be used to preclude further debate - the facts speak for themselves. Wiltshire (1973) refers to the notion of need as a 'premature ultimate' and contends that need is similar to other:

> "... assumptions or concepts which have a spurious finality and which therefore silence questions which need to be raised and block off routes of enquiry which it would be profitable to study."

Likewise Lawson (1975) argues that:

"The concept of need is used in a similar sense as logical stop beyond which there is nothing to be said, nothing to argue about."

This should direct our attention to the process in which statements of need are worked up into political decisions about priority needs, individuals and groups with these needs, and the agencies to be given the task of meeting these needs. As Bell and Courtney (1979) point out there may be a tendency to refer greater weight to assessments of objective rather than subjective needs in the planning process. The assessment of objective needs may be regarded as providing a more independent yardstick for determining the range of provision 'needed' than the subjective wants of the population. This means that social indicators of needs-producing social conditions will be regarded as providing a sound empirical basis for decision. This is confirmed by the tendency of Dutch local authorities to give preference to the assessment of objective needs even at the date-gathering stage. Objective needs could perform the logic-stopping function referred to above.

We have tried to make clear that these objective needs are far from being what they would appear to be. Assessed objective needs are not independent of the notions of need held by 'experts', and are influenced by specific understandings of needs-producing social conditions. It would not be a new insight to suggest that various groups other than professionals may also have understandings of needs-producing social conditions and ideas of associated needs. Given that expert related perspectives are of influence in the assessment of objective needs, it might be instructive to examine the patterns of representation of various perspectives on need-producing social conditions in the plan-making committee. It is the intention of the local planning legislation that the advisory committee should comprise representatives of the various attitudes towards welfare among the population and that the service agencies should also be represented. The composition of the committee is determined by the local authority. In the original debate on the decentralisation of welfare policy, this democratic representation of various interests among users and providers was regarded as a major politicisation of social welfare and especially to increase the influence of (potential) client groups. We

should expect the committee to represent both the demand upon services, and the service providers. The representation of users could provide a check upon the interests of the providers, and could offer the possibility for the introduction of non-professional understandings of needs-producing social conditions and specific formulations of needs by groups in the population.

The research studies of decentralisation, especially in the area of adult education, indicate that the intentions of the law on local planning are far from being fulfilled. In most authorities the advisory committee is composed of representatives of organised interests in the voluntary and state sectors, and the professional representatives of the agencies. The representation of the interests of unorganized users is extremely limited if non-existent. Recent studies present a rather dismal picture of the representation of perspectives other than those of the providing agencies. We are given a view of the planning practice in which the interests of providers dominate the preparation of the local plans. The professionals put themselves forward as the representatives of the population and groups within it, and even organized groups of users - tenants associations, community groups - are not involved to any significant degree. The possibility of participation for the population in public hearings to discuss the draft plan proposals are dominated by the diverse interest groups and the individual 'citizen' is a rare phenomena (Leene en Schuyt, 1982). It would appear not only that local planning has failed to break through the existing distribution of power in welfare provision, but that it may indeed have added to that power by bringing into existence a highly complex planning procedure. The organized institutions have been able to form important coalitions with the new breed of welfare planners in the local authorities. The potential users of welfare provision were to be drawn into a democratic decision-making at the local level but effectively remain spectators at the margin of the planning process. Far from becoming participants they remain the objects of welfare planning. Furthermore, the political parties on local councils have been very ambivalent in their attitudes towards direct participation of the population in local planning. They have often done little to discourage the partnership, or coalition, between the planning professionals and the agency professionals, the former being frequently recruited from the members of the latter group. The preparation of

an educational or four-year welfare plan and annual programme for the authority is a requirement for financing from central government, and the concern of the authority is the completion of this task as effectiently as possible, providing that the minimal legal requirements for needs assessment are satisfied.

The Dutch experience with democratic local welfare planning should present few surprises for those who are aware of similar experiences with participation in public planning exercises and special programmes to this end in the United States or the United Kingdom. The dominance of the perspectives and understandings of professionals and agencies in the working-up of information on needs into policital decisions seems to complement if not add to the implicit bias towards professional perspectives and notions in the needs assessment operation itself. The perspectives of potential users of educational and welfare services are brought into play to a limited degree and mostly by proxy e.g. when agencies and practitioners argue their case. An increasing recognition of this development in local planning has given rise in some quarters to interest in approaches to communicative planning. The Dutch institute for adult education has conducted a research project with communicative planning approaches to the local planning of adult education (Doets, 1982). The approach adopted in communicative planning is based on the recognition that the different actors engaged in the planning process possess different perspectives on problem situations and the needs arising from these situations. An action research model is adopted in which the aim is to develop an improved repertoire for action by those involved in the planning process, and to provide an improved information input and open communication of this information in the planning process. Such action research approaches to communicative planning can depart from the association of the researchers with the different groups engaged in the planning exercise. Doets (1982) starts from the questions and issues which local planners encounter in their educational planning activities. Strik (1982) takes the perspective of the users of welfare services organized at the neighbourhood level as his point of departure. Both share in common the intention to develop those social skills which are regarded as a necessary requirement for the realisation of a democratic local planning procedure based on the communication of information pertinent to the planning process. Action research is the

mode of research chosen to develop these skills, and the central element of this research mode is that the research product should be developed in collaboration with those involved (Doets, 1982). As Strik (1982) argues, this can mean that the understandings of need-producing social conditions and the associated formulations of needs generated by neighbourhood groups can be more effectively introduced into the planning procedures. In this way it is hoped to be able to exploit the margins for participation by the population which are formally available in the legislation on local democratic welfare planning. The product of this approach to action research in communicative planning can be understood as the creation of social resources for the various parties engaged in local welfare planning. In this sense we move away from the idea of educational needs as being objective facticities which can be measured through needs assessment and approach the situation in which needs are regarded as the social resources of the various parties engaged in local planning. To the degree that this action research results in strengthening the position of the users of welfare services it may be seen as a welcome correction of the dominance of the social resources of the welfare professionals in local planning. However, it should be pointed out that the bulk of local authorities pursue the logic of measuring the subjective and objective needs of the population in some way, and that the perspective of communicative planning is shared by few. Clarity as to the mode of action research is only very slowly emerging.

5. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH AND NEEDS

This discussion of the role played by the notion of need in the decentralisation of local adult education planning and the consequential legislation of the requirement on local authorities to undertake needs assessment has raised a number of issues in relation to the use of the need concept in social research, especially that of an apllied nature. There is clearly a long-established tradition of thinking about needs as being "somewhere out there", as empirical entities which can be measured with a greater or lesser degree of methodological sophistication. It has been argued that assessments of objective needs do not seem to be what they appear to be, and that such measures are to a large degree dependent on professional understandings of needs-producing social conditions and the formulation of needs in terms of agency-based categories. The limited participation of the users of the welfare services in local democratic planning tends to reinforce the inherent tendency towards the domination of professionals and their agencies.

Action research in the context of communicative planning has been formulated as a contribution by social researchers to the development of the social resources of the various actors engaged in the local planning exercise. This can be seen partly as a recognition of the existence of different understandings of needs-producing social conditions and associated needs which can be brought to bear in the interaction between users and providers of local welfare services. Needs can be more readily seen as resources which can be generated by various groups in the community - users and providers - and communicative planning can present the opportunity for the provision of more information leading to adjustment of the structure of provision in accordance with the perceptions of the needs which have been mobilized. To the degree that the assessment of the needs of the population is assumed to lead to rational decision-making on the basis of such data, the assumption of communicative planning is that the mobilisation of needs as active social resources in the planning process will also lead to the more affective distribution of the available means to the need vocalized.

In itself this suggests a major reformulation of the need concept as traditionally employed in applied social research. Rather than being a characteristic of the client group which can be measured, need can be

considered as a resource which is socially constructed and to a great degree dependent on those producing such constructs. From this point of view need is not a theoretical construct of which the incidence can be measured, but it is rather a social construct the production of which can be studied. This would involve looking at the ways in which both professionals and client groups develop perspectives on need-producing conditions and associated needs, and how these are employed in social interaction. Need cannot be restricted to being a professional construct alone, although recent criticisms of the tendency of the supply of social services to create their demand would have us believe this (Illich, 1970, Achterhuis, 1979). This is a simplification of the situation in which need is equally employed as a resource by clients and other lay publics (Rees, 1979). Extensive research in social work has demonstrated the capacity of both users and non-users to develop their own perspectives on needs-producing social conditions, their needs, and the capacity of the services to meeting them (Mayer and Timms, 1970; Rees, 1979; Smith, 1980). The limited research in the area of adult education suggests fruitful lines for further research along these lines (Mesirow, 1976; Pilsworth and Ruddock, 1975; Mee and Wiltshire, 1978; Keddie, 1980), but much work remains to be done. This research, however, raises further questions which are of theoretical interest to the student of educational needs. When needs are no longer regarded as the objective characteristics of the client population, but are rather viewed as the social constructs of the various groups involved in the planning process, it is necessary to pose the question of the social-structural factors which may limit or contain the social construction of needs as resources in interaction. To what degree are social actors free to operate in the process of social interaction? Having posed such questions of a theoretical kind regarding the nature of needs, we seek in the following to suggest three main approaches to understanding need in theoretical terms. Practical consequences for applied needs research will not be the centre of attention, but some implications will be apparent.

At this point we wish to distinguish betwen three main theoretical approaches, which we distinguish respectively as the instrumental, interactional, and structural approaches to the notion of need in adult education and social welfare. These show important variations in the formulation of the notion as a theoretical construct permitting analysis

and interpretation of the relationship between (non-)users and providers of welfare services and adult education.

The central characteristic of the instrumental approach to the notion of need in social research is that needs are regarded as a measurable property of the client system. The notion of need adopted is placed in a theoretical model of the relationships between users and providers, in which need is regarded as an unambiguous and measurable phenomenon. Indicators of need can be developed by performing some measurement operation upon the members of the client or potential client population. Various indicators of the level of needs may be employed, varying from subjective felt needs, through socio-economic characteristics of users compared to non-users, to the identification of social problem situations. The providers can undertake these measurement operations - as independent agencies or in public planning - and information about needs allows providers to modify existing provision or develop new programmes. The provision can be tested in terms of its capacity to meet the assessed constellation of needs among the target population. This leads to evaluation research directed at measurements of the effectiveness of provision in needs-meeting.

In terms of the relationships between users and providers this approach suggests a linear model of information flows between the two. Information about needs among the client population permits the providers to develop their programmes, and provides information as to which target groups are interested in which programme. This leads implicitly in the practice of needs-assessment to close identification between programme-development and marketing research. Indications of needs can contribute to different groups of clients. This leads to an interest in more refined measurement operations to bring out the more subtle distinctions between needs among the potential client population. Welfare marketing for non-profit organisations is one such development of needs-assessment as employed by the providers to develop and deliver their programme. In this sense needs-assessments become instruments to suggest instrumental improvements in the linear communication between providers and users. To the degree that needs are indicated by socio-economic characteristics of potential clients sharing common problem situations, individuals and groups among potential service users are focussed upon in terms of individual or

community problems. Those living in certain areas are diagnosed as manifesting the symptoms associated with social problems which the providing agencies are more or less able to deal with. This can result in the input of additional resources into certain selected areas which exhibit a high level of need in terms of low levels educational participation, delinquency, deprivation, and other associated indices of social problems. Potential client populations, whether individuals or communities, are the carriers of those attributes which needs-assessment procedures indicate as being symptomatic of needs i.e. social problems. The providers of services are viewed in this approach to be unproblematically involved in the business of needs-meeting and thus as contributing to the solution of social problems. Given more reliable information about needs the providing agencies can develop and deliver appropriate services to alleviate social problems.

The interactionist approach gives a central place to the interaction between different understandings of needs-producing social conditions and perceptions of needs. The relationship between users and providers is regarded as an interaction process in which their understandings and perceptions are subject to constant development of definitions and redefinitions. The research question is that of how need in welfare and adult education is defined and by whom. Both users and providers bring understandings and perceptions of needs into the interaction process and dominant meanings are established thrugh negotiation. This approach regards need as a problematic category which has to be understood in terms of its social construction rather than as objective entity which can be measured. Need is no longer regarded as a count variable which can be dichotmcusly measured as a discrete objective variable, but is constructed through negotiated meanings of mutually acceptable or dominant definitions of needs. The relationship between users and providers is problematic in the sense that the outcomes of the negotiations between meanings is uncertain. The users and providers are equally engaged in an active way in the negotiations, and of interest is how they mutually intervene in and modify each other's meanings of need.

The focus of research enquiry is upon the ways in which need as a resource is managed by both users and providers, and how specific meanings are accomplished. This leads to an interest in the organiza-

tional or contextual determination of meaning and an emphasis upon the generation of meanings in the practicalities of the every-day situation of the adult education provider and the potential users of services. This directs attention to the processes through which potential users and providers develop notions of need and employ these in mutual interaction. The interactional approach departs from the failure to distinguish between need as an object of investigation and need as a tool of analysis of that object which characterizes the instrumental approach. Need in the interactional approach is regarded as a legitimate object of research but the focus of analysis are the different ways in which different people manage need in different situations. Contextual and situational influences upon the management of need as a resource directs attention to recurring patterns in the social construction of needs, and to these patterns as they are manifested in user and provider ideologies. In the context of local educational planning this would direct attention to the ideologies of professional workers, clients and potential clients, planners, experts, and other constituents of an advisory committee.

The structuralist approach breaks with the assumptions of both the previous approaches. Not only is need not regarded as an objective facticity which can be measured in some way, but the interaction between users and providers is regarded as being influenced by social structural factors which limit and shape the possible outcomes of negotiations. Users and providers interact against a background not only of their immediate contextual and situational environment, but also in terms of broader structures of the organisation and development of adult education. Although most adult education involves the direct encounter between the learner and the adult educator such interpersonal contexts are embedded in legal, institutional, political and economic structures. These structures find their expression in diverse and subtle ways in the relations between users and providers, in particular in the ways in which these relations are achieved and maintained. The structural approach does not assume that users and providers can be brought into a symetrical relationship through an adequate knowledge by the one of the needs of the other, or that the social construction need is equally contributed to by both through open-ended negotiating processes. The relation between users and providers is seen as one of the domination and subordination of their

respective understandings of need-producing social conditions and associated needs.

Shared understandings are not assumed but become the central problematic in the sense that the achievement of shared understandings becomes the object of research. The social mechanisms of achieving shared understandings is regarded in terms of the ideological work performed by the users and providers. When providers succeed in recruiting participants to their programmes they have been successful in the ideological work of convincing potential users that they do indeed have certain needs or social problems to which the programmes offer an appropriate solution. Providers are rarely totally succesful in this ideological work and their hegemony is seldom massive. Furthermore, users may develop their own understandings of needs-producing social conditions and formulations of needs and may succeed in convincing some welfare practitioners to support their claims. Historically we can locate this resistence to the domination of professional understandings in the resistence of the labour movement to the expansion of state welfare provision, and in the more recent forms of self-organisation among diverse groups of recipients of state welfare provision.

In terms of research attention is turned to the ways in which social relations are transformed into needs-producing social conditions and the formulation of needs. Concepts such as users, providers and needs are of interest insofar as they represent manifestations of the patterns of social relationships, and the ideological work necessary to maintain these relationships, or to change them. In this sense needs are ideological constructions which enable the relations between providers and users to be maintained or challenged. The very concepts of users and providers in themselves are ideological in that they suggest that some can provide for others who are not in state to provide for themselves, and as such support existing social relations of domination and dependence. As a consequence it would theratically seem more useful to undertake the analysis of social welfare activities in terms of social practices which give rise to various understandings of needs-producing social circumstances and the formulation of specific needs. Given the social production needs and social problems we might regard social welfare practices as specific ways of producing social problems and problem solutions. In other words social welfare

practices can be distinguished in terms of the patterns which characterise the ways in which social problems and problem solutions are produced. The specificity of social welfare practices can be located in the regularities which characterize processes for the production of social problems, the formulation of problem solutions, and the ways in which potential clients are interpellated i.e. spoken to, or, addressed as the subject with a specific need. In the degree to which these potential clients also transform social situations into formulations of social problems and social solutions, these various social practices in welfare land give rise to relations of agreement, struggle, coalition, dominance and coalition. In this sense needs are produced in and mediate social practices.

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